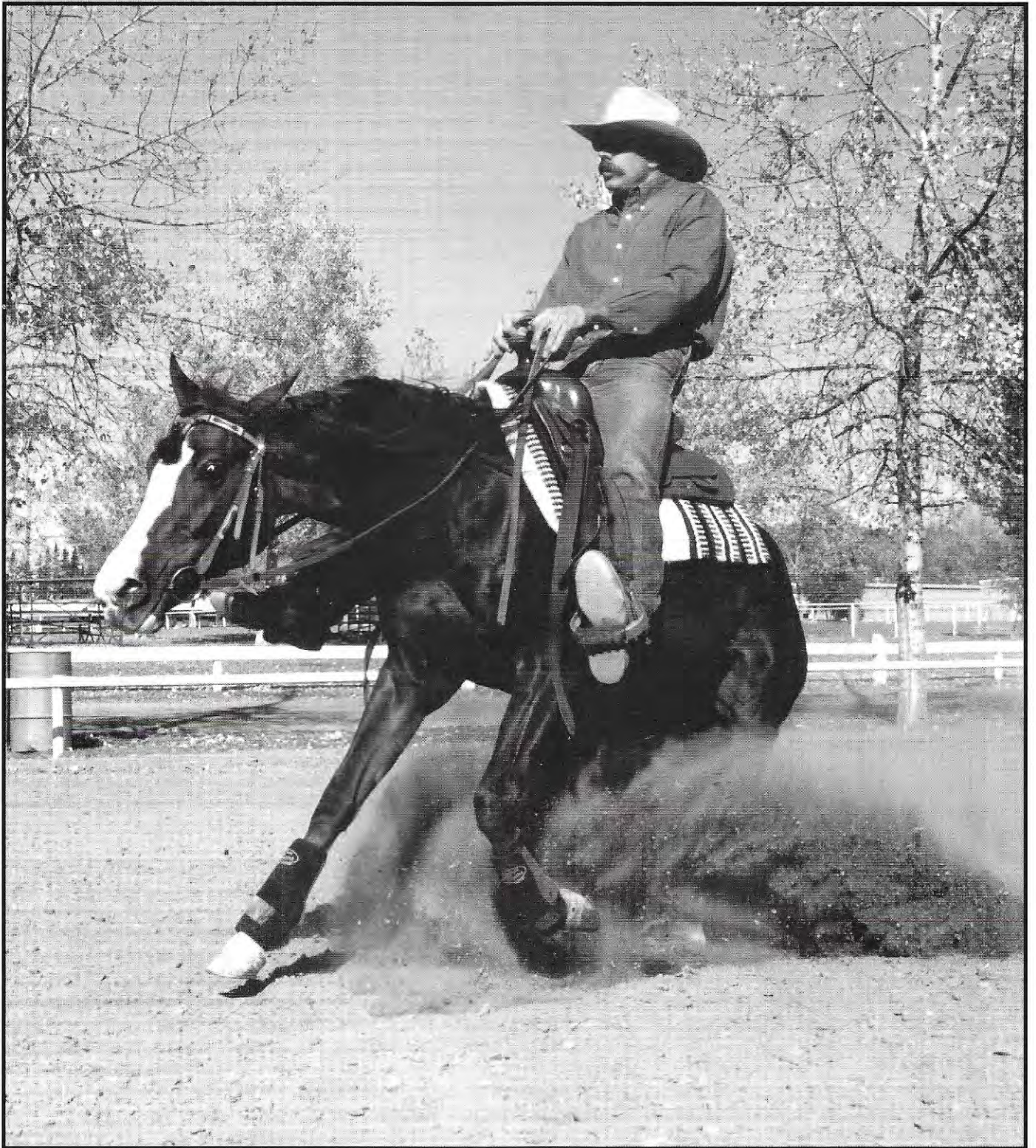


by JESSICA MORRIS

The lights go down and the music starts up. All of a sudden, a horse bursts through the ingate, into the spotlight, and the show is on. Reining: It is a demonstration with a long and complex history behind it that is belied by the ease and grace of the sliding stops and rollbacks being performed in front of you. In the last five years, reining with Morgans has exploded like a horse coming through the ingate, and here, *The Morgan Horse* takes a look at what reining is and why so many people are turning to it.

Because it is a sport that has long been dominated by Quarter Horses, there are only a handful of trainers with Morgan reiners in their barns and we were fortunate enough to catch up with them before the hustle and bustle of Grand National preparations started in earnest.



Ron Brouwer and Drumlin Taffy display the form that earned them the reserve spot in the 1998 Canadian National Championship's Junior Reining Championship.

We caught up with trainer Doug Sande, who is known for his successful partnerships with HVK Command (HVK Fieldmarch x Kissabelle) and PGF Bicentennial (Stormcrest Command x Charlestown Chelsea), and who has several promising Desiderata horses this year. Doug soon realized he was talking to a reining neophyte and went back to the beginning. He explained, "Well, historically, the reiner developed from Portuguese/Spanish dres-

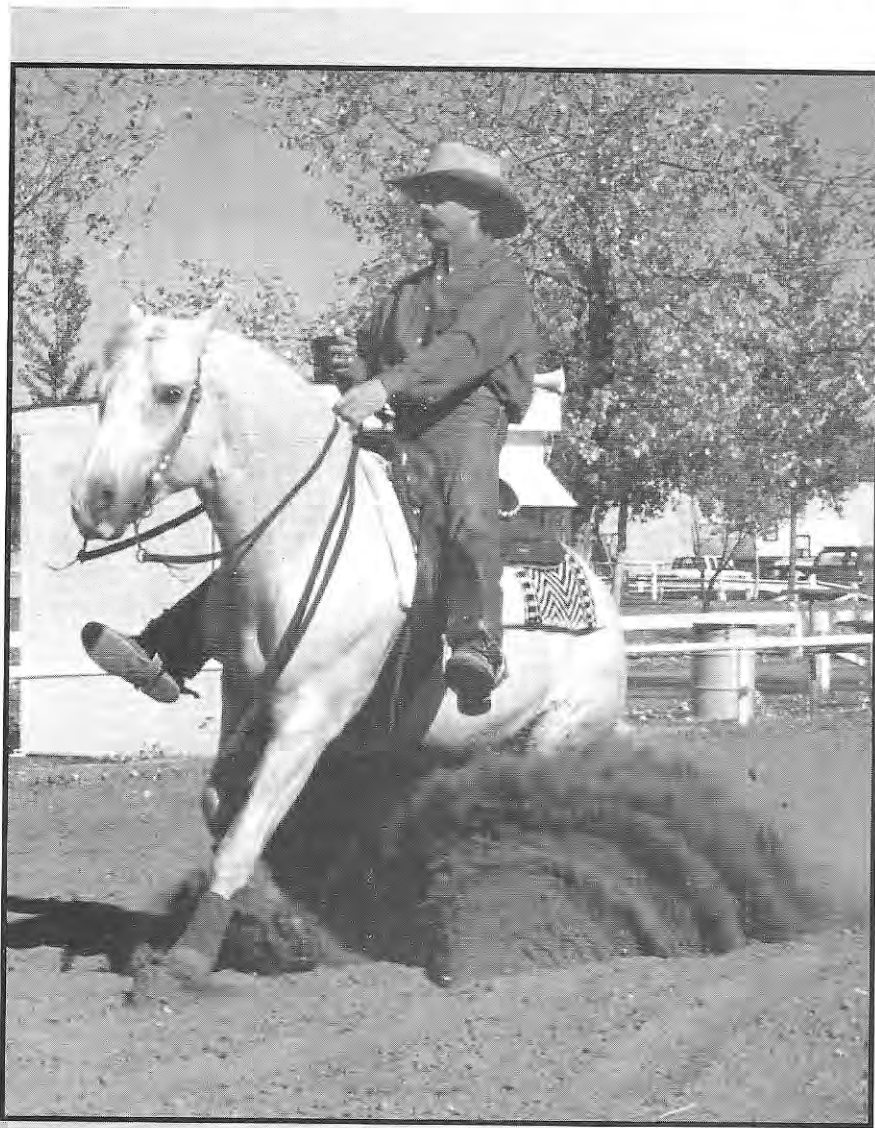
[reining] than meets the eye. It is a very disciplined sport that takes years of training to accomplish," Doug explained. "Dressage is merely training applied for a function. A reining class originally was supposed to be a test for a great working cow horse and the shows just come up with tests to apply the training. All the movements, backing, spins, running circles, waiting, are all working cow horse moves." This comparison between reining and

top three placing horses in the Junior Reining Championship. Ida-Ho Cocoa Ron (Desiderata Alderon x Ida-Ho Patsy) was the champion; Drumlin Taffy (Parralyn Trooper x Drumlin Lucky Lady), owned by Keith and Sherry Gummow of Alberta, Canada, was reserve; and R-Two Feather (Worlds Edge Goldhawk x Silver Hills Farrah), owned by R-Two Horse Ranch, was third. He added his thoughts on the evolution of the sport. "Patterns were developed years and years ago, to show off the moves that would be used working a cow, without a cow. Since then, they've been fine-tuned into something very pretty and flowing for the audience to watch." He continued, "Reining is getting so specific that I feel a reiner should be just a reiner. For example, in reining a sliding stop can be 20 or 30 feet and that would put a cow horse right past the cow!"

There is, however, something to be said for going back to the real thing. Ron added, "Of course, working them on cattle does keep their minds fresh." Other reining trainers concurred with Ron, including Shawn McClurg. Shawn also was just back from Canada, where he rode Vonne and Morris Tarnavsky's BCM Impressive Lee (Jada Hallee x Lady's Pizzazz) to win the Senior Horse Reining Championship. More recently, he and Lee won the Open Reining Championship at Montana Morgan. He said, "I keep 20 head or so of steers around to train the reiners with. Reining is just like working a cow without the cow. With the cow they're learning rollbacks and stops and all of it. The cows teach the horse to teach himself, which is all we're trying to do anyway."

With or without cows, training a reiner is a long process. Unlike many disciplines, where a horse's potential can be sleuthed out in 60 days, it may take up to six months to see whether a horse is cut out to be a reiner. It all starts in the round pen. As Ron said, "I work every horse the same. They all get the round pen treatment in the beginning so we deal with them psychologically, and they tell you how they move and you see if they are going to be a handy reiner or not." And *then* the training begins!

While reining is burgeoning in popularity, there is also a very high turnover in the sport, with the length and complexity of the training being one reason why. As Doug Sande said, "There is a big future in Morgan reining, but one of the drawbacks is that there is a huge turnover because people see a reining class and get excited about it because it's fast and exciting, and then they learn that it really takes years of



Here, Ron is aboard the powerful palomino stallion ABCM Liz's Dreamwalker.

sage horses who were brought over by the wealthy landowners of the early West to work the cows. They [dressage and reining] parallel each other in a lot of ways and it is a very fair comparison." Visions of Lipizzaners leaping through the air clashed in my mind's eye with the dusty world of reiners, and that is when I learned the first secret of reining: "There is much more to it

dressage came up again and again.

And like dressage, or like anything done for its own sake, reining has developed beyond its original purpose. Another successful Morgan reining trainer, Ron Brouwer, talked to us shortly after returning from the Canadian National, where he was one of two professionals showing. Ron had a successful show where he rode the

patience to accomplish." It may also take years to get to the show ring, because, unlike nearly every other discipline, there are no beginner reining classes. There are classes for green and first year horses, but these specifications apply more to the level of the competition than to what is asked of the horses. As Doug said, "The reality is that the NRHA doesn't have low level classes." There is a logic to this, because, after all, who would enter a class where all that was judged was the shifting of the rider's weight in the saddle to encourage a half-halt or stop? As Doug said, "I could give 90 lessons a week if I wanted to, but I try to be selective about who is going to stick it out because otherwise it's a waste of everybody's time and money."

All the trainers I spoke to had mostly Quarter Horses in their barns, and had only recently begun to know Morgan people and their horses. It seems like the beginning of a positive relationship, though. Doug Sande had a few tips for the prospective reining customer. "Morgan people might help themselves by asking the trainer for help in selecting a reining horse," he added. "The game is to find a good trainer and you do that by going to the shows and finding somebody who you are impressed with, and then see if they will take your horse. *And then listen to the trainer!*" He acknowledged, "Morgan people understand what it is to have a horse in training, even though they are a little naive about the length of time and training progress of a reiner."

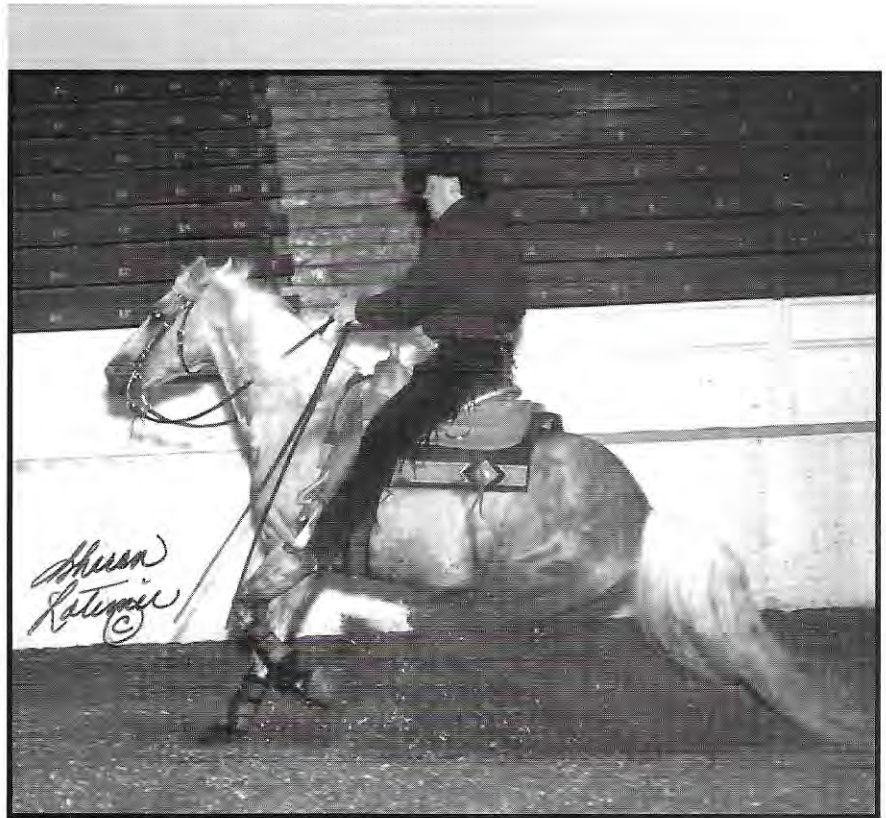
Taking time off from competing is part of the progress of a reiner that many people may be unaware of. In fact, this article was intended to spotlight a selection of reiners who have been doing well until I found that three out of the five horses I had chosen to write about had taken the 1998 season off. Another horse in training with Ron Brouwer, Pat and Liz McFall's ABCM Liz's Dreamwalker, was one of those on leave. Ron said, "Dream is taking a break and breeding this year. Mentally and physically, they need a break." Part of the reason they need a break is due to the fact that they start training young. However, all the trainers to whom I spoke agreed that this does not pose any risk to the horses. As Shawn McClurg explained, "In the Morgan world, people are very fearful of starting their young horses for fear of breaking them down, but I see nothing wrong with starting a long yearling under saddle, getting them broke, and then starting to train them as a two-year-old." As an illustration of pace of training progress for a reiner, Shawn talked about BCM Impressive Lee.

"He's a really pretty circling horse, only five years old, not real solid in his leads yet." Knowing that Lee has been with Shawn for a little more than two years, the comment gave me some sense of how long it takes a reiner to become rock solid and to perform consistently. And although the sport is demanding, those who participate in it are very careful of their horse's welfare. As Vonne Tarnavsky said, "Shawn has done excellent background work and my horse has stayed sound. As you progress, you have to check the horse for mental and physical soundness."

Another horse of considerable reining fame who displays the same slow, solid

to make a mistake," she added. Lana credits More Apples' longtime trainer, Scott Seeklander, with her mare's amazing track record. "He does an excellent job, quiet and easy, and he doesn't push the horses. He allows them time to develop on their own," she said.

It appears that the success of Morgan reining hinges on finding and keeping official National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) judges. There are several reasons for this. The NRHA judging system is very standardized and, as Shawn said, with an NRHA judge "a plus one turn is a plus one turn!" With the numerical scoring system you can learn from your rides



Shawn McClurg on BCM Impressive Lee, the 1997 Grand National Reserve Reining Derby Champion. (Photo © Latimer)

maturation is Lana Tout's More Apples Please (Mortana Pat x DJP Storm Princess), the 1997 Grand National Reserve World Reining Champion. More Apples has just turned seven and has been in training since she was four. "She scores mostly 71s and 72s now," said Lana. In a reining class, a competitor starts with a score of 70 and then points are either added or deducted depending on the execution of the maneuvers. The speed at which maneuvers are executed is a factor in gaining points. "She has become so consistent now that it is very rare for her

because each move is scored individually and your score is basically a playback of your rides. Shawn added, "Non-NRHA judges usually just place you and you don't really know how you did or why."

With the need for standardized judging so clear, one assumes the reasons why it is hard to secure at Morgan shows must be complex. They are. Being highly qualified and specialized, NRHA judges are expensive and because Morgan reiners are a relatively new show segment, the classes are usually small and the cost of hiring a NRHA judge is not necessarily covered.

Additionally, reiners are spread out across the country and this makes a show of support even more difficult to make. Another stumbling block is that at class "A" shows, all judges must hold AHSA cards, and most NRHA judges don't, so the pool of available, affordable people dwindles further. Vonne Tarnavsky explained, "Hiring judges is not cheap and we just don't have the depth of classes yet to support the big payoffs."

Despite these obstacles to increasing the number of Morgan reining classes judged by NRHA judges, it is a growing division. As Vonne added, "The classes

their horses will be better trained and this will attract more interest and more people will see it as it grows and the whole sport will snowball into popularity."

Slowly but surely, the snowball is increasing in size. It has probably received its greatest push from Travis Filipek and her efforts with the National Morgan Reining Horse Association (NMRHA). Travis explained the "mission" of NMRHA: "Our organization is dedicated to promoting and creating markets for the Morgan reining horse and to ensuring that the integrity of the Morgan reiner is maintained through its association with

ipek has done a great job promoting [Morgan reining] and she should be thanked for all she's done," he said. "Second, there are a lot of people out there working together, in one direction. At the first Nationals there was some dissension among people, but now there's a lot of cooperation." Doug Sande agreed. "Generally, Morgan reining is a really positive thing and a lot of the time people just don't get credit for it." This cooperation has created persistent efforts to persuade shows to hold reining classes, the development of rules for reining classes and non-NRHA judges, guaranteeing entries for the classes, and finding financial support through derbies and incentive programs. And the experience of entering reining classes at all Morgan shows is extremely positive. Doug reported, "All the Morgan reining I have been to is quite classy and I've never been to a Morgan show where they didn't drag the ring between classes. That is unheard of in Quarter Horse competition!" He continued, "The 1997 Grand National competition was top-notch; they had two NRHA judges, you got the ring to yourself, and they dragged between every rider!" Likewise, Shawn McClurg and Ron Brouwer agreed that the Canadian National was a "first-class show."

A close cousin to reining classes are working cow classes and they are worthy of mention in that all the trainers I spoke with expressed interest in both seeing and supporting such classes at Morgan shows. And it appears that there are already a few potential entries for such classes. Lana Tout reported that More Apples Please has started in working cow classes and has won the three classes she entered this year, all in open competition.

As I write this, excitement is mounting for the 1998 Grand National and the NMRHA Derby with its six (to date!) entries: Drumlin Taffy, KEE Black Maria, Victory's Pistol Pete, Sweetbaby RJ's Royal Blue, Rustic V April Fools, and Ryan's Major Player. Best wishes to all and no matter how things go out there, something for all who are interested in Morgan reining to bear in mind is that reining has been accepted as the sixth Olympic equine sport and it is expected that the first United States team will be assembled for the 2008 Olympic Games. Talk about incentive programs!



Author's Note: For more information on Morgan reining, contact Travis Filipek at NMRHA, R4 883 Tipperary Road, Oregon, Wisconsin 53575. Phone/Fax: (608) 835-7442.



Scott Seeklander and More Apples Please. (Photo © Latimer)

seem to be hanging in there strong!" This year, even the New England Regional, bastion of park and pleasure classes, sported green, non-pro, and open reining classes. Reining with Morgans has the nature of a grassroots movement; all the changes are occurring from the bottom up and they are starting to get the attention of the reining world as a whole. As Shawn told us, "The bulk of my business is NRHA and Quarter Horses but when the Morgan shows offer prize money and get the NRHA judges, then that gets my attention." He added, "This sport needs [a cash infusion] so more people can afford it and

the NRHA." Last year, the 1997 NMRHA Derby, funded primarily through the NMRHA's Sire and Dam Program, paid out \$4,200 and, as of the date of this writing, that amount is more than doubled for 1998. As Travis said, "The enthusiasm for this discipline has been phenomenal. As an indicator of future growth we have only to look at the growth of the NRHA to realize the potential is enormous." Let it not be said that NMRHA ignores youth either; this year they hosted a Beanie Baby raffle as a fundraiser!

There have been other positive changes, too, described by Shawn. "First, Travis Fil-